

Mars Society Convention

August 3, 2006

Good morning. Since my boss kicked off your morning session, and you just heard from Elon Musk, I've got two very tough acts to follow. But you're about to embark on your Capitol Hill blitz, so hopefully I can provide some political perspective before you head up there.

Before I do that, let me just say that I share your vision for a spacefaring civilization – one in which the entire solar system is part of our way of life. Under the leadership of this White House and NASA Administrator Mike Griffin, NASA now has a vision that allows us to take those first steps on a long journey to the Moon, Mars, and future destinations in the solar system.

My job as Assistant Administrator for Legislative Affairs is to manage the agency's relationships with three separate but related groups – the U.S. Congress, state and local elected officials (which includes everything from Governors and state legislators to local mayors) as well

as the political arms of trade associations, interest groups, and industry representatives.

The Mars Society recognizes that politics is a major element of the Vision for Space Exploration, or you wouldn't be meeting here in Washington – believe me, there are a lot cooler places to be in August.

So let me offer some observations on what everyone agrees is a tough political environment. The good news is that despite uncertainty about the upcoming mid-term elections, despite the budgetary challenges faced by Congress, and despite numerous other pressing domestic, homeland and national security needs, NASA has fared well in the FY 2007 appropriations process so far. The House completed its version of our spending bill in late June, and in the process defeated two amendments that would have gutted NASA's plans for exploring the solar system. The House bill also fully funded development of the Crew Exploration Vehicle and the Ares family of rockets.

An amendment offered by Rep. Anthony Weiner of New York to transfer funds from NASA for funding to hire local law enforcement

officers was defeated 185-236, and an amendment offered by Rep. Barney Frank of Massachusetts to bar use of any funds for a manned mission to Mars was defeated 145-274. Even though the Frank amendment didn't actually recommend cutting specific funding, and we aren't spending money directly on a manned mission to Mars at this time, NASA and its allies effectively argued that much of our technology development and lunar planning are precursors to Mars missions.

Likewise, the Senate Appropriations Committee passed last month a NASA funding bill that again includes full funding for the CEV and Ares.

Through these appropriations bills, Congress has – so far – followed through on its endorsement of the Vision for Space Exploration as embodied in the 2005 NASA Authorization Bill, which calls upon the NASA Administrator to “establish a program to develop a sustained human presence on the Moon, including a robust precursor program, to promote exploration, science, commerce, and United States preeminence in space, as a stepping-stone to future exploration of Mars and other

destinations.” That bill garnered wide, bipartisan support in the House and Senate.

And you heard this morning from Mike Griffin how he intends to carry out that mandate through a balanced portfolio of missions in space exploration, scientific discovery, and aeronautics research as well as engaging potential international partners and the commercial sector.

Finally, polls show the American public is on our side. A 2004 Gallup poll showed 68% of Americans support the Vision for Space Exploration, and in a 2005 Gallup poll that number had jumped to 77%.

So with a track record of passing pro-Vision legislation in the Congress, a supportive public, and an Administrator assembling the right team to execute the Vision, you might be tempted to say that we can coast to victory.

But you’d be wrong.

Last week, the *New York Times* attacked NASA’s focus on exploration, ignoring the mandate given to it by bipartisan majorities in the House and Senate.

And just this past Monday, a *Washington Post* editorial stated that the President “needs to get his head out of the stars” and that his announcement of the Vision in 2004 “flopped”. The *Post*’s writers clearly didn’t see the Gallup polls showing overwhelming support by the American public.

Our nation’s major media outlets clearly still don’t believe human space exploration should be a priority for NASA. My point is not to incite alarm about a single editorial or a single news story, but rather that we need to pay attention to the long-term view of this battle of ideas. Like or it not, media outlets like the *Post* and the *Times* do matter. They influence elected officials, financial markets, and the general public. Despite the ground they’ve lost to cable news and internet-based news sites and blogs, they still command massive audiences of readers.

We may win this year’s budget battle, but if we don’t focus on the long-term sustainability of the Vision for Space Exploration, and ensure that future Presidents and future Congresses – regardless of which party is in power – winning today’s battles won’t mean a lot.

In the battle of ideas in which we are engaged, we have to stay focused on the fundamentals. We have to convince future generations of voters and politicians that the human exploration, development, and settlement of space is an endeavor worthy of spending federal treasure and risking human lives.

To do that, we have to remain in solidarity as a community. As Mike Griffin mentioned earlier, NASA's numerous stakeholders have many goals, some of which complement one another, but many of which do not. The Administrator has chosen to move the agency forward in a manner that promotes unity among – rather than division between – these stakeholders. It is not easy.

Yet we must find common ground, or none of our goals will endure.

Therefore, I challenge the Mars Society, as well as other space advocacy organizations, to find those common goals and work to ensure the long-term sustainability of the Vision.

We have to convince the next occupant of the White House that space exploration should remain on the national agenda. We must not allow a nay-saying media to convince Congress and the American public that the United States should cease exploring space. And we must engage our state and local leaders so that they understand the value of exploration to their local and regional communities.

The debate cannot be about Moon versus Mars. The media story cannot be about infighting among advocates of space exploration. The story must be about why our nation has to explore, and how our very future as a world leader depends on it.

We all know the reasons we must explore. History plainly teaches us that the nations that explored and developed their frontiers were the world leaders of their day. Those who abandoned the frontier fell into the footnotes of history books.

The Roman Empire mastered the land. The British Empire, Spain, and Portugal mastered the sea. The United States mastered the air. 21st century leadership requires mastery of land, sea, and air – but also space,

both in Low Earth Orbit and beyond. Our scientific, economic and national security interests demand that the United States must be that leader – so we must not fail in our efforts.

As you prepare for your Capitol Hill blitz, remember that what you are doing will have implications for generations to come. We have made great strides for the short-term, but the Vision for Space Exploration is still a newborn and must be carefully nurtured, protected, and cared for.

We are embarking on a grand enterprise that has the potential to fundamentally change our society. But in order to do so, we must find a unity of purpose and demonstrate real value to our nation's leaders and those who elected them. Please help us by working towards that unity, and don't take your eye off of the long-term goal – sustainability in the eyes of the voting public.

Thank you.

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